**Berberis thunbergii - Japanese Barberry** *(Berberidaceae)*

*Berberis thunbergii* is a popular but spiny small shrub. Japanese Barberry is very fine-textured and very urban tolerant, with a wide selection of foliage color variants. It is often used as a single specimen, in group or mass plantings, or as a low thorny informal border.

**FEATURES**

**Form**
- small ornamental shrub
- maturing at 5' tall x 5' wide for the species form, with the varieties and cultivars of the same size or smaller
- upright rounded growth habit for the species form; upright rounded or spreading mound growth habit for the various cultivars
- slow growth rate

**Culture**
- full sun to partial sun
- adaptable to poor soils, various soil pHs, soil compaction, drought, and pollution
- propagated by rooted stem cuttings
- few disease or pest problems
- moderately to abundantly available as different cultivars, primarily in container form; however, the species form is rarely available

**Foliage**
- red, yellow, green, and variegated foliage forms are all available
- alternate leaves are spatulate to obovate, with the base very drawn out, being cuneate to linear but having no petiole
- margins are entire
- autumn color is variable, being orange- to wine-colored in late autumn for green- or red-foliaged forms, and yellowish-green to off-yellow for golden-foliaged forms

**Flowers**
- yellow, in late Apr. and early May, in pendulous clusters directly from the stems
- not showy from a distance but attractive when viewed close-up, and attracting many bees

**Fruits**
- red ellipsoid small fruits are sparse to rare on the cultivars, but often persist into the following spring
- can be attractive when viewed up-close, but are almost never dense enough to be showy

**Twigs**
- zigzag, thin, and lightly grooved; small, scaly buds
- single, thin, small spines occur along the stems
- stems, branches, and roots are brittle and easily broken when bent, pushed against, or during transplanting, revealing a bright yellow interior wood

**USAGE**

**Function**
- specimen shrub, facer shrub, or edging shrub (for the smaller-sized cultivars)
- formal hedge, informal hedge, or barrier shrub (for the larger-sized cultivars, or the species form)

**Texture**
- fine texture in foliage and when bare
- thick density in foliage and when bare

**Assets**
- cultivars available in several vibrant foliage colors
- urban stress tolerant
- slow-growing and of small mature size
- amenable to shearing

**Liabilities**
- spines (if they are not desired)
- garbage collector to blowing trash and leaves, along the lower stems
- brittle stems

**Habitat**
- Zones 4 to 8, including all variants listed below, but not performing as well in the humidity of hotter climates
- Native to Japan

**SELECTIONS**

**Alternates**
- urban tolerant, deciduous, spiny shrubs serving as hedges or barriers (*Acanthopanax sieboldianus*, *Berberis mentorensis*, *Rosa rugosa*, etc.)

**Cultivars – Variants – Related species**
- Bonanza Gold™ - a new introduction with bright golden yellow foliage in full sun, not subject to leaf scorch (as is the standard golden cultivar 'Aurea'), maturing at 1.5' x 3'
- 'Kobold' - kelly green foliage in spring, maturing to dark green by late summer, maturing at 2' x 2'
- *B. thunbergii var. atropurpurea* - Red Japanese Barberry - similar to the species form in growth habit (upright, then arching) and size (5' x 5'), but with red-purple to maroon summer foliage color, and best placed in full sun:
- 'Crimson Pygmy' (also known as 'Nana' or 'Atropurpurea Nana') - the most common Barberry, and one of the most common of all ornamental shrubs, very slowly maturing at 2' x 3', with deep redwine spring and summer foliage when properly placed in full sun, climaxing as an orange-red autumn color in good years; please note that, in partial sun to partial shade, the foliage color takes on a bronzy-green, rather than red-maroon color; in fact, to see firsthand the color transition, peek within the self-shaded portions of the shrub, or turn a leaf over and look at its pale-colored underside
- 'Rose Glow' - a variegated mixture of pink and maroon splotches, with new foliage much lighter in color than more seasoned foliage, with an upright then arching growth habit, maturing at 5' x 5'